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A READING PROGRAM FOR GIFTED CHILDREN IN THE PRIMARY GRADES.

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THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF THE GIFTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILD FOR READING INSTRUCTION ARE DESCRIBED. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF GIFTED PUPILS INCLUDE TEACHER OBSERVATION CRITERIA AND STANDARDIZED TESTS OF INTELLIGENCE, READING READINESS, AND ACHIEVEMENT. IDENTIFICATION SHOULD BE BASED ON A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ALL POSSIBLE DATA. GUIDELINE PRINCIPLES OF INSTRUCTION INCLUDE (1) INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION TO PROVIDE MORE GUIDANCE IN ADVANCED CRITICAL AND CREATIVE READING AND MORE INDUCTIVE INSTRUCTION RATHER THAN DEDUCTIVE INSTRUCTION, (2) GIVING FLEXIBILITY IN ASSIGNMENTS TO ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY READINESS ACTIVITIES AND REPETITION, AND (3) ENCOURAGING PLEASURE IN READING AND BUILDING ON DIVERSIFIED INTERESTS. TITLES ARE SUGGESTED TO HELP PROVIDE SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR THE WIDE RANGE OF ABILITY AND INTERESTS. MATERIALS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT IN STUDYING WORD ORIGINS AND THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE. METHODS FOR TEACHING CRITICAL EVALUATIVE SKILLS AND RESEARCH STUDY SKILLS ARE SUGGESTED. READING CAN BE A STIMULUS FOR A VARIETY OF SUCH FOLLOWUP ACTIVITIES AS CREATIVE WRITING, DRAMATIZATIONS, AND REPORTS WHICH ARE DESCRIBED. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (BOSTON, APRIL 24-27, 1968). (CM)

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3B READING FOR THE GIFTED

PROGRAM FOR GIFTED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

"A READING PROGRAM FOR GIFTED CHILDREN IN THE PRIMARY GRADES"

Educators today face an all-important challenge in providing for the reading needs of gifted students in the elementary grades. Our nation as a whole tends to lose most when pupil capability is high and his reading achievement low.

In the Harvard Reading Report, Austin et al. (1) indicated that while some educators seemed aware of the need to do something about superior readers, there was little evidence that much of any consequence was being done. Her conclusion was based on the interviews the investigators conducted which respondents in twenty-nine of fifty-one school systems

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indicated that bright readers in the classrooms received the least instructional emphasis. In only one instance did the replies from a school system say that instructional emphasis for the talented was greater than for any other range of pupils. Based on these and other findings, all teachers, administrators, reading consultants and other members of the school staff must obviously be concerned with the need for some action to be taken early in the elementary grades to effectively identify and challenge the reading potential of gifted pupils through proper motivation, methods and materials.

IDENTIFICATION OF GIFTED PUPILS

In developing a reading program for gifted pupils, it is important that we identify these children through a variety of methods.

In some school systems, gifted students have already been identified and placed in special schools and in special classes. In these situations, the identification of these gifted children does not create a problem for the classroom teacher since they have already been examined using formal and informal measures.

In the primary grades, much information can be obtained through teacher observation, cumulative records, standardized individual and group tests of mental ability and other informal tests and procedures such as the results of memory games and contests.

Through informal observation primary grade teachers can determine the bright child who possesses a large speaking vocabulary, retains much of what he sees and hears without a great deal of drill, performs difficult mental tasks such as being able to reason things out, generalize, solve problems with ease, and recognize relationships. Young gifted pupils also often possess a wide range of interests and are very curious and respond quickly in class. They are often very original in their thinking and can

often do work one or two years above their classmates. They often have a high capacity for listening to oral directions and are able to note details within the stories they tell, in the reports they give, and in the pictures they paint. It is important to note that the child who exhibits only one of the above characteristics would not likely be considered a bright pupil as opposed to one who possesses many of the above characteristics.

Standardized group tests of mental ability should also be used as a supplement to teacher observation in the identification process. Whenever possible, a potential bright pupil should be given an individual intelligence test such as the Revised Stanford-Binet, Form L-M (Houghton-Mifflin Co.) or the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, (Psychological Corp.)

We might also consider certain reading readiness tests such as the new Gates-MacGinitie Readiness Skills Tests (Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University) when attempting to obtain an estimate of general intelligence since research has indicated a high correlation between intelligence and reading readiness test performance.

Very often standardized achievement test scores from such tests as the SRA Achievement Series (Science Research Associates) or the California Achievement Tests (California Test Bureau) may provide a clue to potential giftedness at the primary level. These tests may reveal consistent scores in several areas such as reading, math or science that may be two or more grades beyond their present level. These achievement tests may also be used to discover certain academic disabilities in bright children and point the way for remedial work or special emphasis in teaching. If the score in reading on an achievement battery is low, a more diagnostic reading test might be given to further pinpoint the gifted underachiever's strengths and weaknesses in reading. Potential gifted underachievers can also be identified

through systematic observation of the physical, social, and psychological factors which may cause or contribute to underachievement in reading. A comparison of the bright pupil's listening ability and reading ability as determined either formally or informally may give some insight as to whether the pupil is reading up to his capacity if standardized reading and intelligence test scores are considered invalid or unavailable.

During the process of identification it is important to remember that the gifted pupil should be selected only on the basis of all available data, not merely on an I.Q. score obtained from a group test of intelligence.

ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF INSTRUCTION

In attempting to provide a stimulating and challenging reading program for gifted readers at the primary level, it may be essential to consider the following principles since their reading needs do vary somewhat from other average or slow learning pupils:

(1) Emphasis must be placed on individualizing instruction for the gifted pupil. Differentiation of instruction is the hallmark of an effective reading program for this learner. The practice of lock-step instruction is deadly for any student and particularly so for the gifted student.

(2) The gifted pupil is often more capable of self-directed learning. He may want to go ahead under his own steam in reading if he is provided with some very simple directions and adequate materials. He often does not require the step-by-step instruction other students need.

(3) The gifted pupil at the primary level also needs flexible reading assignments. The pupil who is forced to conform to general reading assignments for the entire class may become bored and disinterested. If this situation continues over extended periods of time, the gifted child's boredom may become habitual.

(4) The gifted pupil may not need an intensive and extensive readiness program at any level as average and slow learning pupils may require. The readiness program must be adapted to the bright child and his needs at that time and not to the class in general.

(5) The gifted pupil also needs guidance in critical and creative reading skills since his powers to do logical and critical thinking may easily become much greater than the average student.

(6) Since the gifted reader often can think, generalize and solve problems at a higher level than other children, he must be challenged constantly if learning is to take place and interest maintained. Emphasis on drill in reading should be avoided. The gifted child may need less participation in class-wide drills, in workbooks or in readers that have very limited value and appeal.

(7) Since the gifted child at the primary level can gain a great deal of self-fulfillment through reading, instruction should aim at not only the development of information gathering skills but also aid him to become a confident happy individual through developing his pleasure in reading.

(8) The gifted pupil should not be penalized by expecting him to complete huge assignments merely because of his potential. More of the same is not what is needed. An important consideration in all the reading he is required to do should be quality and not quantity.

(9) The gifted pupil frequently has a longer attention span than the average learner. Therefore, one may be able to teach him for longer periods of time. He often does not require as many repetitions when mechanical or other reading skills are presented as other children in the classroom may need.

(10) Emphasis during reading instruction should be placed more on inductive instruction rather than deductive instruction for the gifted pupil.

Reading instruction should aim at comprehension of broad principles rather than the accumulation of detailed facts for these students.

(11) The gifted pupil often displays more diversified reading interests than other pupils. Teachers therefore, should build on these interests during reading instruction.

Bearing these basic principles of instruction in mind, reading should become more interesting and challenging for these pupils in the primary grades.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND METHODS

As I indicated in the preceding section, instructional materials as well as techniques must be individualized for these pupils. A wide variety of thought provoking materials are necessary ingredients in a well-designed primary reading program for gifted students. As he gains in reading skill during the beginning stages of reading instruction, an ever increasing range of reading material must be made available. It is important that the classroom library and the central library have current reading material for gifted pupils.

It is very important that materials be selected on various levels of difficulty to challenge the most advanced readers in the classroom. A few copies of a number of different kinds of skill books for developing word recognition skills and other materials dealing with critical reading skills should be available for those gifted children who need this development. These materials might be separated according to exercises, classified and filed under different headings for use by bright pupils. By developing a kind of "Critical Reading Lab" of this kind for instance, bright pupils can be challenged in their ability to do logical and critical thinking. Enrichment programs such as the new Sights and Sounds Program (Random House) for example, trains beginning readers in reading and listening through a wide variety of books, accompanying tape recordings and listening posts. The Carousel Books (L.W. Singer) offers gifted

readers a completely individualized program that stresses literary appreciation and critical evaluation which should provide the challenge they seek. Each box in the Carousel program contains a set of discussion cards for each book which list key words and questions that can be used for teacher-pupil conferences. The Owl Series (Holt, Rinehart and Winston) should also supplement and extend the bright child's learning in science, math, literature and social studies. All these materials should certainly broaden the scope of many existing reading programs and provide the necessary enrichment for the gifted at the primary level.

Many bright pupils at this level also enjoy the challenge of locating words, learning the country of origin and ascertaining their meaning. With the gifted pupil's deeper interest in the historical development of language, books like Epstein's First Book of Words (Franklin Watts, Inc.) and the Lairds' Tree of Language (World Publishing Co.) should have appeal in the upper primary grades. Lower primary bright youngsters would enjoy Krauss' A Hole is to Dig (Harper) and Pop-Up Sound Alikes (Random House). Another book telling what words are, and what they can mean to lower primary youngsters is Rands' Sparkle and Spin: A Book About Words (Harcourt, Brace and World). Bright pupils should be given an opportunity to explore the meaning of foreign words which are sometimes listed at the back of basal readers and other trade books. Further individualized vocabulary study can be done by using newspapers, magazines, pupil selected books and content area materials.

The "experience" approach is another valuable technique to use with bright underachieving pupils in developing vocabulary. By capitalizing on their varied interests, teachers can develop experience stories. The bright underachiever will evidence enthusiasm and enjoyment if he has a part in the preparation of his instructional materials as his vocabulary increases.

Since gifted pupils can be challenged to do more logical and critical thinking in the early grades, a balanced program should also provide instruction and materials which will allow for further development of these abilities. For example, they might compare two different new articles on a subject. Other gifted children might compare various biographies and fictionalized stories about famous individuals.

In the primary grades, teachers can give an oral account of a story that the children have read silently adding some untrue statements. As soon as bright pupils hear something that is not true they can clap or raise their hands and supply the correct answer or tell on what basis they know the statement to be false.

I believe that provisions for critical reaction of books read should also be a part of the primary program. In preparing an oral or written report, bright pupils should be encouraged to include a few evaluative comments or opinions on the merits or demerits of a particular book. Book evaluation could be based on criteria which the child may have established himself or in conjunction with his peers.

Several specific lessons should be included on teaching such study skills as outlining, summarizing, using a table of contents, index and glossaries. These lessons are especially valuable for bright pupils who want to work independently on some problem or project.

Bright youngsters in the primary grades also need an opportunity to balance their reading interests since many tend to concentrate too much reading in a single area. This tendency sometimes appears in an area such as science and other informational type reading. With this in mind it is certainly desirable to have a wide variety of books accessible so they may stimulate these bright children to read in other areas. Geboe (2) found that a program

of folklore reading was very effective for superior readers in the third grade. In her report, folklore was confined to the reading of fairy tales, fables, and myths.

Informal book talks by other classmates should encourage others to read these books and expand interests. Attractive book displays and colorful exhibits of book jackets which are changed regularly help to broaden their interests.

Time must also be provided for the sharing of books. This can be done most effectively at the primary level through:

-- radio and television plays

-- puppet shows

-- flannel board stories

-- tape recorded stories and reports

-- dioramas

-- dramatizing a fairy tale

Children's literature also offers a wealth of stories which will also stimulate the creative writing ability of these students. You may want to read part of a book and stop at an exciting point and have them write their own ending to the story. Other story starters such as "If I Hibernated...", "If I Were a Teacher...", "If I Invented...", "If I Discovered...", "If I Followed a Bumble Bee..." should spark the creative imaginations of many gifted youngsters.

With the ideas presented in this paper, it is my hope that teachers, reading consultants and administrators will be in a better position to recognize and aid bright underachievers reading below grade level, those reading at their present grade level and the ones whose reading achievement is two or more years beyond their grade placement. Our nation's future depends on how we have

met the challenges of our bright pupils sitting before us today.

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